

When It Rains – Ella, Year 5, VIC

When it rains, we don't get to run outside because the rain will ruin our clothes. When it rains, thunder booms and claps and lightning sparks the horizon. When it rains, Remmy Smith hides under her desk because she's scared the whole classroom will crumple into a million pieces at any moment. Finally, when it rains animals are washed out of their homes or hit by skidding cars.

If you can't tell, I hate the rain, so I'm very annoyed that I have to walk home in it.

It's not a short walk either. Usually, I catch the bus home but for some reason all the bus drivers decided to catch the flu in the rainiest week I've ever seen. (Well, except for that one time on the news when I saw that really flooded country town, but that will never happen in our little country town- at least that's what dad told me.)

Like I said, my house is about 2 kilometres away from school, so it's intensely inconvenient that the bus is cancelled. The only thing that keeps me going is the thought of the wood heater that we have at home in our lounge room. It's my favourite place in the whole house, even better than the couch in front of the TV, or the big tree in the paddock with all the cows, because it's so warm and snuggly. Also, because it's the only place with a memory of mum.

If you haven't figured, I live on a farm with dad and our cows. Dad built it all himself, apart from a few smart little additions by mum, and every week he goes down to the market and sells milk, cheese, cream and sweet, yummy ice-cream. Mum died when I was 2 and that's another reason that I hate the rain. I mainly hate the rain because it killed my mother.

Dad hates talking about it, so he only told me once, he said that one night there was a flash flood and the rivers had raged and thrashed. Mum had always been attracted to danger he said, and so she had decided to take some photos for a competition she was planning on entering. She had taken her photo gear and gone by herself. All dad heard was a scream. He had run down to where she said she would be and discovered the river had eaten his wife alive.

I continue walking with the strong scent of eucalyptus in my nose. I love everything at this time of year in Australia. Here in autumn, we have festivals on cool evenings, and you might even be lucky enough to see a wombat wobbling home or a kangaroo hopping by. My favourite is going on a walk with dad and watching the baby koalas cling to their mama's backs, and climbing trees to put baby birds back in their nests.

I look up at the sky as the heavens open up and the soft pitter patter becomes a hurried pour on my lightly freckled nose. This isn't so bad. Then my foot stubs something on the road.

Oh. Oh no.

The grey lump that my foot hit isn't moving. At all. Not even the tiniest bit. Its dark, grey fur is matted and worn like it's been there for a while, and as the rain continues to fall, I notice the puddle of dried-up blood coming from just below its stomach. There's no denying it now. This koala was hit by something and judging by all the skid marks I've see while walking home this is yet another victim of a skidding car. And the rain. The rain causing the car to skid.

I'm still wondering what the blood is from when I start to walk away, and I hear dad's voice in my head. He once told me that if you ever see an injured wombat or koala by the road you need to turn it over and check its pouch for any babies that might have survived. I go back.

First, I double check the koala is really dead. It is. I then flip it over, carefully avoiding all the blood and bugs and check the pouch. Ohhhh. So that's where all the blood's coming from.

This isn't good. I need dad. In the koala's pouch is a baby koala barley breathing but alive. Its brownish-grey fur is thin and tattered, and its right leg is crushed and disfigured like it was smushed under a giant rock with blood oozing from it fresh and thick. This koala needs dad.

I remember dad once telling me about the time his dad, (my grandpa) carried a dying kangaroo he found by the side of the road all the way home, where he bandaged it up and sent it on its way. That's what I'm doing to this koala.

"Don't worry Douglas," I whisper. "It'll be ok." I decided to call this koala Douglas. He just looks like a Douglas. "I'm sure dad will fix you up."

I'm not sure at all, but that's what you need to say to a koala when its dying. Douglas's leg is looking worse, and his little chest is shaking and heaving with his eyes are closed. I'm speed walking through the path until I notice the giant blue gum up ahead and realise, we're closer to home than I thought. I silently pray that Douglas will hold on for 5 more minutes and start sprinting through the paddocks to the house.

"DAD!" I shout. "Dad help me!"

"What is it May?" dad says. "I'm kinda busy with Liz."

Liz is one of our cows who's going to have a calf soon, but this is more urgent than her doctor's appointment. Douglas lets out a soft moan and I call dad again.

"DAD, COME HERE RIGHT NOW!"

"May I'm busy-" he stops when he sees what I'm holding. "Oh May, put it on the table with a sheet underneath- and grab the first-aid bag from the cupboard."

Dad's voice is shaky but certain. I hear him washing his hands in the sink and Douglas whimpers again. His little chest shakes, and he shivers as I grab a sheet and lay him on top. That's when dad rushes in and lays his bag on the table. I smell antiseptic on his hands and see the syringe and bottle of liquid the vet said to give Liz when the pain gets bad, to make her go to sleep.

"Maybe go to your room May," dad says to me. "Things are going to get a little bloody."

I hate blood so I go down the hall to my room. I can hear dad muttering to himself. Things like 'that goes there', and 'just like dad told you'.

I'm so worried about Douglas that I can't even read a book to take my mind of him. What if when dad amputates his leg, (I figured he would do that by the knife and anaesthetic he had),

all the blood in his little body drains onto the floor until there's none left in him? Or dad overdoses the injection that puts him to sleep for a bit and makes him go to sleep forever?

The minutes that pass feel like hours until dad finally comes into my room, sweaty, but smiling and I know Douglas will be fine. I need to ask dad a very important question though.

"Dad," I ask hesitantly "Can Douglas stay here?"

"That depends," dad says. "I'll let him if, and only when he's better, he'll stay in the tree overnight okay?"

"Okay."

"I like the name Douglas by the way." Dad says. "How did you decide?"

"I just like the name." I shrug.

"That's great," dad smiles. But just so you know, Douglas is a girl." He smiles and we both laugh.

"Of course, she can stay." Dad whispers in my ear.

A few months later me and Douglas are out in the paddocks. I'm watching her climb a tree. She's just reached the second branch and the rain starts to fall and I realise I don't mind it anymore. In fact, I like it. The rain brought me Douglas. Mum brought me Douglas, because when it rains baby koalas' lives are saved and they live happily ever after in trees with their best friend May. When it rains.